

Message Text

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72

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9404

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 6900

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SUBJ: REPORT OF CABINET CHANGES

SUMMARY. FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL TOLD EMBOFF DEC. 27 THAT MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMERCE AND INDUSTRIES WOULD LOSE THEIR JOBS IN NEAR FUTURE. CHANGES WOULD BE INTENDED TO IMPROVE "FUNCTIONING" OF GOP AND PRESENT POLITICAL BALANCE OF GOP WOULD REMAIN UNDISTURBED. OFFICIAL THUS CONFIRMED RUMORS OF POSSIBLE CHANGES WHICH HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING.

1. FOLLOWING THE APPOINTMENT OF DR. ARISTIDES ROYO AS MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND THE SHIFT OF MANUEL BALBINO MORENE TO BE CHAIRMAN OF THE NEWLY FORMED NATIONAL SUPPLY COMMITTEE, THERE HAVE BEEN PERSISTENT REPORTS THAT MINISTER OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, GERARDO GONZALEZ, WOULD LOSE HIS JOB. IN ADDITION, WE HAVE HEARD THAT NICOLAS BARLETTA, MINISTER OF ECONOMIC POLICY AND PLANNING, FERNANDO MANFREDO, MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRIES, AND JUAN MATERNO VASQUEZ, MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT AND JUSTICE, WOULD ALSO BE OUSTED.

2. A FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL, WHEN ASKED BY EMBOFF DECEMBER 27 WHETHER THERE WAS ANY BASIS TO THE RUMORS, SAID THAT GERARDO GONZALEZ AND MANFREDO WOULD LOSE THEIR JOBS, BUT THAT BARLETTA

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WAS NOT IN ANY DANGER. HE SAID THE REASON FOR THE CHANGES WAS

TO IMPROVE THE "FUNCTIONING" OF THE GOVERNMENT. GONZALEZ HAD BEEN UNABLE TO RUN HIS MINISTRY EFFECTIVELY AND MANFREDO LACKED "POLITICAL" ABILITY. SOURCE DID NOT SAY WHO WOULD REPLACE THEM, BUT SAID THAT THE ECONOMY HAD NOT BEEN GOING WELL AND THE MINISTRIES HAVING RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PRODUCTION AND COMMERCE NEEDED TO BE STRENGTHENED. WE HAVE NO CONFIRMATION CONCERNING THE FATE OF MATERNO VASQUEZ.

3. THE SAME SOURCE DISAVOWED ANY POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE TO THE IMPENDING CHANGES. HE PRAISED DR. ROYO AS BEING A LIBERAL IN POLITICS, DYNAMIC, CAPABLE OF RESOLVING DISPUTES AND BEING A GREAT IMPROVEMENT OVER EX-MINISTER BALBINO MORENO. THE "POLITICAL" EQUILIBRIUM OF THE GOP WOULD BE MAINTAINED.

4. COMMENT. THE PERSISTENCE OF THE RUMORS CONCERNING GONZALEZ AND MANFREDO, PLUS THE FLAT STATEMENT BY A FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL THAT THEY WILL LOSE THEIR JOBS SEEM TO BE FIRM INDICATIONS THAT THEY WILL BE OUT. IT IS HARDER FOR US TO BELIEVE THAT BARLETTA WILL BE OUSTED. HIS OUSTER, COUPLED WITH MANFREDO'S EXIT, WOULD RUN COUNTER TO TORRIJOS' PRESENT TACTIC OF SOOTHING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND WOULD NOT CONTRIBUTE TO A "BALANCE" IN THE GOP'S POLITICAL OUTLOOK.
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